



Rosa mundi



Wyck—a 19th Century American

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In 1814 a freshly relocated Philadelphian by the name of Jane Bowne Haines wrote to her sister from her new home at Wyck, her husband's ancestral family estate in the bucolic village of Germantown. "I find our situation here much pleasanter than I anticipated [but] we have not however many beautiful views or a fine garden to show our visitors." Although it would be a decade-long process, the landscape of



Old Roses at Wyck (*photo by Laura Keim*)

brought one closer to an understanding of God. Many members of this family were passionate collectors and cataloguers of objects from the natural world, and the museum today is filled with their collections.

But was Jane's rose garden perceived at the time as just another example of the family's collection of natural objects? It seems not. Wyck's rose garden speaks of an

this southeastern Pennsylvania farm would eventually include a beautiful rose garden, installed on the site of an eighteenth-century kitchen garden.

This development would not have surprised the young Jane Haines, a woman of means and determination. However, she had no way of foreseeing that the garden that grew out of this uninspired property would not just outlast many generations of her family, but persist through repeated cycles of neglect and eventually survive into the twenty-first century to become an extremely rare example of an early American rose garden.

Today, first-time visitors to Wyck may feel a momentary sense of displacement as they step through the gate, turn their backs on a cityscape of asphalt and concrete (Germantown became a part of Philadelphia in 1854), and enter a different tableau. From the noise and grit of modern life, the scene changes abruptly to one of venerable trees, open lawns, perennial and vegetable gardens, buildings dating from eighteenth century onward, and the crown jewel of the landscape, the manicured rose garden of Jane Haines.

Wyck belonged to nine generations of the same Quaker family from 1690 until 1973 when it transitioned into a new identity as a historic house museum and garden open to the public. Over the centuries the Wister-Haines family passed down a deep love of horticulture, a legacy that may have been influenced by their Quaker faith. Quakers viewed religion and science through the same lens, believing that God's hand was visible in the structure and organization of nature and that an understanding of the natural order



ABOVE: Arbor at the entrance to the rose garden at Wyck, 1924 (photo by Mr. Leibscher)

ABOVE RIGHT: Wyck Garden, 1932



inextinguishable desire for a space devoted to beauty and pleasure. Correspondence from the time seems to reinforce this. “Our garden is most beautiful—the roses never were finer,” wrote Jane in 1827. Quakers were advised to observe the testimony of simplicity and it was cus-

tomary to eschew even the intimation of frivolity. The indulgence of a rose garden could be justified by the strict religious guidelines of the time because its delights were natural rather than fabricated by humans. It also would have provided recreation, as evidenced by the many rose-flanked gravel paths designed for strolling. Quakers’ participation in aesthetic pursuits, such as music and painting, didn’t develop until late in the nineteenth century, so the garden would have provided one of the very few entertaining diversions in the family’s daily life.

In a document from the early 1820s, Jane Bowne Haines listed a total of 22 roses in the garden, describing them with varying degrees of helpful terminology. Only one is listed both by its common and Latin name—the common red rose or *Rosa gallica officinalis*. Other familiar roses included the ‘Moss Rose’, the ‘Provence Rose’, the ‘Monthly Rose’, ‘Champneys’ Pink Cluster’, *R. alba*, ‘Bella Donna’, *R. spinosissima*, and *R. pennsylvanica*. The identities of other roses can be inferred. “Variegated rose” must be *R. gallica versicolor*, or ‘Rosa Mundi’. The “Wild rose” described on the list is probably the native *R. setigera*, referred to by the name “Prairie rose” elsewhere in Wyck papers from the



time. This plant still exists, climbing on a *Magnolia soulangeana* that was planted when the garden was originally installed. Unfortunately, other plants on the list were described in terms that are inadequate for identification purposes, such as the “Jamaica rose” and the “E Morris Tennessee rose from J Thompsons.”

A number of roses present in the garden today are not definitively listed on the original document, but are roses that had been introduced commercially by the time the garden was planted. No one knows how long the pre-1750 Damask rose ‘Celsiana’ has been in the garden, but it is one of the more robust varieties and now fills an entire bed. Known locally by the name ‘German-town Damask’, it was said to be growing in the neighborhood of Wyck as early as 1700. Another Damask that is present in quantity in today’s garden is the pre-1827 ‘Pink Leda’, a sport of the famous ‘Leda’. And as of the early 1970s the garden was populated with a number of specimens of the pre-1840 Hybrid Perpetual ‘Rose de Rescht’, some plants of which still remain.

Although the rose garden originated in the 1820s, visitors today will not experience it as a garden encased in amber. The original parterre design has always remained consistent, as has the boxwood edging, first installed in 1833, as well as the general placement of the roses. But from a study of written descriptions and photo documentation, it is clear that the appearance of the garden has changed along with trends in horticultural fashion. The earliest photos of the rose garden from the 1870s show a typically lush and almost overblown Victorian style featuring bold and showy plants intermingling with the roses. Vines and climbing roses luxuriate, draping heavily over posts and arbors and weaving in and out of trees. But a photo from 1902 clearly shows the influence of the then popular Colonial Revival style of gardening. Here, what are probably the same roses are clipped to form standards. Some perennials and other ornamental plants have been removed, giving the impression of a more restrained gardening style. Written accounts of the garden from this time period describe the roses in stand-alone beds, pruned and placed so as not to mingle.

The most recent historically accurate additions to the Wyck rose garden were installed in the early part of the twentieth century by eighth generation family member Jane Bowne Haines II, one of the first female horticulturists in the United States. These include one of the last great Hybrid Perpetuals, the 1901 ‘Frau Karl Druschki’. This plant, currently the oldest rose on the property, may still be found in its original planting location, where it was installed in 1910. Other introductions from this period include the Wichuranas ‘Silver Moon’, ‘American Pillar’, and ‘Dr. Van Fleet’, and the Multiflora ‘Tausendschön’. No rose varieties introduced after 1910 are planted in the garden.

By the late 1930s, photos show the garden featuring a somewhat looser, more relaxed horticultural style. This change in appearance could have been the result of not only a new trend in garden design but also the beginning of yet another cycle of de-



cline in the garden. The last generation of family members to inhabit the house lived there only in winter, and by the early 1970s famous rosarian Léonie Bell described the garden as being “in a shambles, hardly to be walked through. We had to force our way through the overgrown Box, much of which had split apart or died back, the weeds and wineberries, and into every remnant of path, the suckering roses.” The garden with its intensive maintenance had become overwhelming to its elderly owner, Mary Troth Haines. She considered turning the property over to a number of institutions before deciding to donate it to the Wyck Charitable Trust, under whose ownership it remains.

Although not well documented in the more recent annals of Wyck history, much credit for the rescue and renovation of Wyck’s garden in the 1970s must go to Léonie Bell and her protégé, Reverend Douglas Seidel. Drawing on their immense knowledge of old roses and their rose-sleuthing abilities, the two were able to identify many of the cultivars whose names had been lost over time. Those that had disappeared from the garden were replaced, often with cuttings from their own collections. They were even charged with naming an unknown cultivar (see sidebar on page 11).

Today, the garden is intact and well maintained. More than thirty years on since its last overhaul by Léonie Bell and Reverend Seidel, the garden again finds itself ready for another round of scrutiny. The important Damask ‘Bella Donna’ is no longer listed in the key to Wyck’s roses. Other roses of historic significance have disappeared as well, including the 1896 Rambler ‘Aglaia’, which grew against the chimney within the last ten years. Also included in the original list of roses but not currently present are the red China rose ‘Odaheite’ and *R. pennsylvanica*. Plans for the immediate future



LEFT: Conservatory door (photo by Laura Keim)

ABOVE: “Elegant Gallica” (photo by Kent Krugh)



Wyck in 1902 (courtesy of Wyck)

include the replacement of these roses as well as further research into which plants genuinely belong in the garden, and which may not.

Every landscape changes over time, and the task at Wyck is not necessarily to try to hold change at bay, a futile exercise as any gardener knows. Not just a relic, Wyck's rose garden is best appreciated not just as part of an historic continuum. As the world outside the garden changes, so does it, but in a manner such that were Jane Haines to return to her beloved garden today, 175 years after she left it, she would instantly recognize it and many of its inhabitants. And not only that, she would be able to read a record of what has occurred in the garden between her time and now.



In January 2008 NICOLE JUDAY closed her landscape design business and began working as the horticulturist for Wyck, an historic house museum and garden in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. There she tends the two-and-a-half-acre site, works with local children in an outdoor education program, helps run an on-site farmers market, and facilitates horticultural workshops. She is just beginning to research old roses, aided by Wyck's collection of over 100,000 documents.